

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek – Waive Bag Limits

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

This proposal is to lift fishing bag limits for trout on two central Montana waters that are scheduled for westslope cutthroat trout restoration efforts later this summer--Camas Lake in the Big Belt Mountains near White Sulphur Springs and Elkhorn Creek, on the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area north of Helena. Camas Lake is scheduled for a chemical treatment in August to remove Yellowstone cutthroat trout; while Elkhorn Creek is scheduled for electrofishing activities, also in August, to remove cutthroat/rainbow hybrids from a portion of the creek. On both waters, FWP is proposing to immediately waive the bag limits to allow anglers to catch and keep as many of these fish as desired in advanced of the native fish restoration efforts. The portion of the Elkhorn Creek where the bag limit waiver would apply stretches from the confluence of the east and west forks of Elkhorn Creek downstream about one mile to a man-made barrier. Currently on Camas Lake, the limit is five trout daily and 10 in possession and on Elkhorn Creek it's catch-and-release only. Under this proposal, there would be no limit for trout caught through Aug. 15.

Public Involvement Process & Results

A 30-day public comment period will end on July 3. As of June 26, a total of five comments were received. All were in favor of lifting the bag limits on these two waters. Two commenters elaborated on their support. One expressed the desire that bag limits be raised for non-native fish species in all waters across the state, especially warm-water species. The other commenter was opposed to removal of these fish using chemicals, and would prefer to see the fish physically moved to other waters than be killed with chemicals.

Alternatives and Analysis

No Action: Pro—There would be no increased demand on the Enforcement Division to ensure compliance with this new rule; Con—Anglers would not be able to harvest increased numbers of fish prior to the suppression/eradication efforts, and would contribute to their sense that fish are being needlessly wasted.

Waive Daily Limits on Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek: Pro—This would meet anglers' desires to not waste fish, and would help build public support for the cutthroat restoration efforts. There have been no known problems with previous limit waivers; Con—This could place more demand on Enforcement Division to determine which stream fish were harvested on the Beartooth WMA; similar problems on Camas Lake would not occur because there are no other waters in the area which are accessed from the same trailhead that also contain Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

The Department recommends that the bag limits be waived on these two waters to build public support for the project and to answer anglers' desires to not waste fish.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the Commission immediately waive the bag limits on Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek to allow anglers to catch and keep as many of these fish as desired in advanced of the native fish restoration efforts through Aug. 15.